

On 29th May, 1956, I was requested to identify a bird that had been at large in Theobalds Park, Cheshunt, Hertfordshire, from at least the 14th May. On arrival I found the bird in the area that it inhabited until its disappearance some time after the 30th May—a dense growth of willows and other deciduous trees by a secluded lake. The bird was obviously a species of weaver that had escaped from captivity, careful field notes were taken, and by reference to skins in the British Museum (Natural History) the bird was eventually identified as an adult male of this species, a native of Uganda and Belgian Ruanda. This individual spent much of its time perching in a hunched position on a fallen branch protruding from the water, with its body plumage very much fluffed out. From this position it would frequently indulge in successful fly-catching sorties at which it proved most adept. When feeding in the trees it was very acrobatic, but somewhat lethargic in its movements, hanging from the tips of slender twigs and picking green caterpillars from the leaves. These caterpillars formed a large part of its diet during the period it was present. When in flight over any distance it flew fast and straight like a starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, with the short square tail splayed out. Mackworth-Praed and Grant (*Birds of Eastern and North-Eastern Africa*, 2:911) state that the call of this species has not been recorded. It may therefore be of interest to state that on several occasions a short “cheep” and a sharp “chip” note were uttered by this bird, both notes being very similar to those of the house sparrow *Passer domesticus*. During the period of its sojourn this weaver showed no desire to associate with any other species of birds, neither did it ever leave the vicinity of the lake. On the whole it was very quiet and unobtrusive in its habits, but most noticeable when perched in the open on account of its predominantly yellow colouration.

I am indebted to Mr. G. A. Horsley of Enfield, Middlesex, who was one of the first to notice this bird, for bringing it to my attention. It was seen on 30th May, but the date of its death or departure is not known.

Taxonomic notes on the Spotted Owl, *Athene brama*, and the Striated Weaver, *Ploceus manyar*, in Siam, including a new race of the latter

by MRS. B. P. HALL

Received 19th September, 1956

An examination of material in the British Museum (Natural History) from the collection of birds made in Siam by the late Sir Walter Williamson has shown that in that area the races of the Spotted Owl, *Athene brama* (Temminck), and the Striated Weaver, *Ploceus manyar* (Horsfield), require revision, with the recognition of a new race in the latter species. These notes have been made in consultation with Mr. H. G. Deignan and the revision has been made possible by the generous loan of specimens from the United States National Museum.

Characters and Range of Athene brama mayri Deignan

Mayr (*Ibis*, 1938:313) drew attention to two aspects of variation in *Athene brama* in Burma and Siam. He suggested that the Siamese birds might prove separable from the Burmese birds, *A.b.pulchra* Hume, on

greater size and on having rather heavier spotting on the upper parts. Later Deignan (*Auk* 1941:398) gave the name *A.b.mayri* to the birds of northern Siam which he distinguished from those of Burma and lower Siam on longer wing length, 152–163 mm. against 138–152.

Sixteen specimens from lower Siam in the Williamson collection have wings from 147–157, showing that the more southern Siamese birds run larger than Deignan's material had led him to believe. The following table gives comparative measurements of birds from Burma, northern and lower Siam based on specimens in London and Washington.

Area	Wing length	Average	No. of specimens
Burma	140–153	146	20
Northern Siam	147–168	154	18
Lower Siam	141–157	151	26

These measurements show that it is difficult to recognize two races in these countries based on size alone. However the Williamson birds in comparison with the Burmese material in London show very markedly the heavier spotting noted by Mayr. The spots on the head of the Siamese birds are large and the spots of the back clear and white, while in the Burmese birds the spots on the head are small and those on the back few in number and tending to be off-white rather than pure white. Additional specimens borrowed from Washington show, however, that these characters are not always constant, two specimens from Mandalay having larger spots and one from near Chiang Mai having reduced spotting. Nevertheless, although there are these few atypical specimens, I believe that the difference in pattern shown between the majority of Burmese and Siamese birds, combined with the average difference in size, make it useful to recognize two races. *A.b.mayri* can therefore be used for all Siamese birds.

A single specimen from southern Annam is rather less heavily spotted on the back than most Siamese birds but in the whiteness and size of the spots on the head agrees with them. It seems probable that *mayri* will be found to be the race of Indo-China.

A new race in Siam of Ploceus manyar (Horsfield)

The Striated Weaver, *Ploceus manyar*, has a wide distribution in the oriental region but is of local occurrence, so that it is poorly represented in collections. Four races are recognized: 1, *P.m.manyar* of Java. 2, *P.m.peguensis* Stuart Baker of Burma, Assam and Bengal. 3, *P.m.striatus* (Blyth) of north-western India. 4, *P.m.flaviceps* Lesson of southern India and Ceylon. In *manyar* the dark parts of the plumage—the feather centres, ear coverts, throat and streaks on the breast—are dark brown: the breast and flanks are washed with rich chestnut: the head of the male in breeding plumage is golden yellow. In *peguensis* the dark parts are black or blackish: the breast and flanks are washed with buff: the head of the breeding male is lemon yellow. Both *striatus* and *flaviceps* are similar to *peguensis* but are slightly paler and vary in the amount and extent of the streaking below, and in the colour of the head of the male in breeding plumage.

Up to the present the few available specimens from Siam and Annam have been referred to *peguensis*. However, twenty-one specimens in the Williamson collection, together with ten others in London and Washington, show

that birds of these countries combine some of the characters of both *manyar* and *peguensis* but are quite distinct from either. In my opinion they represent a new race for which I propose the name

Ploceus manyar williamsoni new race

Description: Males in breeding plumage, and females, similar to *manyar* in having the dark parts of the plumage brown rather than black: similar to *peguensis* in having a buff, not chestnut, wash on the underparts: less heavily streaked below than any other race: the head of the male in breeding plumage intermediate in colour between the golden yellow of *manyar* and the lemon yellow of *peguensis*.

No specimens of males in non-breeding plumage have been examined. It is to be expected that, as in other races, they will resemble the female in pattern but with slightly heavier markings.

Type: ♂ Samkok, central Siam, 11th June, 1921; in the Williamson collection, Brit. Mus. reg. no. 1955.1.4192. In breeding dress. Wing 70 mm. On the collector's label the iris is recorded as brown, the bill as black.

Specimens examined: Siam-Bangkok 9♂ 11♀, Samkok 2♂, Bung Boraphet 1♂? (this appears to be ♀), Chiengrai district 1♂. Annam—Phanrang 1♂, Dran 1♂ 1♀, Tourane 1♀. All taken in the breeding season except the last. Compared with 8 *manyar*, 67 *peguensis*, 8 *flaviceps*, 50 *striatus*.

Remarks: A Samkok specimen has been selected as the type rather than one from Bangkok as Mr. Deignan tells me that he does not know of any record of this species wild from Bangkok itself. It seems likely that the specimens labelled "Bangkok" are from localities outside such as Paklat, five miles to the south, where Herbert (*Journ.Nat.Hist.Soc.Siam* 6, 1926:118) records nesting colonies. He gives the breeding season there and at Samkok as mid-June to August or September.

Mr. Deignan also tells me that the lack of specimens taken in the non-breeding season is not due to local migration but to difficulties of collecting, the birds gathering in the rice fields in large flocks which are difficult to approach. I am very grateful to him for his unfailing patience in answering my many queries on Siamese birds which have arisen throughout my work on the Williamson collection.

A "Needle-tailed" Black Guillemot

by DR. JAMES M. HARRISON

Received 1st November, 1956

The interesting note by Dr. Jeffery G. Harrison¹ on a "Needle-tailed" Guillemot (*antea* 57.8, pp. 113-114) prompts me to record a similar condition in the Black Guillemot, *Cephus grylle* (Linnaeus).

Through the kindness of Mr. H. E. Axell I received a first summer female which was found on Dungeness on 2nd August, 1956. By wing measurement this specimen belongs to the form *C.g.atlantis* Salomonsen.²

This bird, which had died of an enteritis, showed a very remarkable state of plumage. The whole of the body plumage shows some degree of wear, particularly on the mantle and rump, and generally appears rather scaly, this being due to the worn and faded tips of the first summer feathers, the "subtractive moult" of Harrison and Staples.³